

CHAMPS STORY

Baseball Considered Violent, Anti-Social By Cricket Players When Introduced Classic Reply As Conacher Queries

Baseball has not always occupied the unique niche in summer time sport it holds now in Acton. It was preceded by cricket and lacrosse as the game in which popular attention dwelt. According to "Acton's Early Days" baseball began to be popular over seventy-five years ago but never attained its present stature until well into this century.

Fred Storey organized one of the first baseball clubs in Acton and named it the Victorias. The club played in the old commons facing John and Agnes Streets where St. Joseph Rectory now stands. Another club was organized by Bill Ryder and they played on the north east corner of the commons where the late Evan Jones house and barn stands.

Unlike the cricket of the day, baseball was noisy. In cricket that sort of thing is frowned upon. Cricket taught self-restraint and sportsmanship. The more violent and anti-social forms of self-expression were taboo. Baseball was strictly in diverse directions and perhaps that accounts for its slow development in the mid-Victorian muck of that day.

Rules accumulated slowly. For instance, there was no standardized bat until one player tried to pull a fast one by showing up with a bat as big and thick as a log from a settler's cabin. About that time the O.B.A. stepped in and whopped up rules and regulations to be enforced, written on the code then existing in the United States.

It is the American's proud boast that baseball is the national game of the United States. Some Englishmen, however, scornfully refute these claims and say baseball is but a derivative of "rounders", a game played in England when King Harold lost the battle of Hastings by looking up for a pop fly.

Nil Desperandum

Acton clubs like the Nil Desperandum of 75 years ago played outside town whenever the opportunity came. Early files of the Free Press tell a story which would astonish all town teams today. The Acton team went off on baseball excursions similar to the road trips of the league teams today. The trips consisted of the team traveling by rail to villages and towns along the route playing the home team at individual stops. News of the success they enjoyed was despatched home each day via the telegraph key and each week published in the Free Press.

To enhance their prestige in the world of baseball Acton sometimes imported a pitcher and catcher to augment the strength of the team. Milton found particular delight in winning a game from Acton with their imported pitchers. The Milton Champion of 1898 comments that despite a pitcher from Detroit U.S.A. the Milton nine could still trim Acton on occasion.

In the early years of the Halton County baseball league Acton played a prominent part in the proceedings that has continued to this day. Milton and Oakville usually wrapped up the championship but found some pretty stiff opposition from Acton and Georgetown.

Rules were enforced with the same degree of thoroughness they are today. As a result to keep a winning combination Acton sometimes imported a batter. Often enough batters would not come in for their compensation and go at the expense of the club and incurring considerable fees as well. The local boys on the team played just for the heck of it, their reward consisted of being a member of a winning club.

In Recent Times

Recently, the Acton club renewed the policy of importing players and last year 1949 went to the Int. "A" semi-finals before being put out by Strathroy Royals which club ironically was mainly composed of U.S. imports. It was a banner year for baseball and the class of ball was excellent.

1947 will stand in the eyes of Actonians as the best baseball year ever. In that year Acton Intermediates were entirely "home-brew". The club won the Int. "C" championship of the county and eliminated teams left and right in their quest of the Ontario crown. In October the boys succeeded in bringing home the first Ontario baseball championship to Acton. The team of that year was considered the best all-round club ever to appear in Acton uniform.

Because of limited space it is not possible to elaborate further on the trials and tribulations of the players and other interesting anecdotes. Herein we intended to give only a sketchy history of the game and many things remain to be written.

In Canada there is about one radio to every four persons.

The ancient feud between Acton and Georgetown, has been intense at many times especially in hockey, but through it all combatants on both sides have managed to preserve their sense of humour and friendship despite the extravagance of claims of either side during the heat of an exciting season.

To illustrate, the following piece came from the Georgetown Herald in the 30's when Gordon Alcott, now a prominent sports director in Mt. Dennis started an extensive hockey scheme with the Georgetown kids that he called the Midget H.L. played in Toronto as guests of the Montreal Maroons. Lionel Conacher considered Canada's greatest all-round athlete and then prominent Maroon was discussing with "Haldy" Northcott the merits of the plan.

The Herald says: "The Maroons were very much impressed with the idea of Midget hockey as played in Georgetown but the pay-off came when Lionel Conacher enquired the whereabouts of Georgetown and the reply came back from Northcott: 'It's near Acton'."

That item gives a pretty fair illustration of the place that Acton held in the hockey world then although might be interpreted otherwise now.



CONGRATULATING JACK KENTNER JR. as he touches home plate after smashing a home run over the right field fence at Viaduct Park, Toronto, are players of the 1947 Int. baseball team. That four ply smash tied the game at 2-2 and Acton went on to win 3-2 in a fourteen inning struggle. This contest was the classic of the semi-final series with the sharp clawed Sunderlands of Tigers and is usually acknowledged as the deciding contest for the championship.

Lively Ball Topic 75 Years Ago, Too

Baseball as played 75 years ago was hardly the intricate game it is today. That was the era of the lively ball—a ball that had oodles of bounce and rules introduced had to correspond to its resiliency. It will come as no surprise then to learn that a foul ball on first bounce was an out, only the catcher wore a glove and it just a light leather pad for protection as he took his place as much as twenty feet behind the batter, the batter was permitted to signify where he wanted the pitcher to throw the ball, square bats were in fairly common usage as hunting bats, and many other regulations existed which might provoke amusement today. Nevertheless, enthusiasm for the game was keen and the following account of a big game between the Nil Desperandum of Acton and Guelph Maple Leafs appeared in "Acton's Early Days":

"Big scores were the pride of the players those times. One time about fifty-five or sixty years ago the Nil Desperandum of Acton persuaded George Sleeman's big team of Maple Leafs from Guelph to come down and have a match. They came they saw they conquered. But what a match. The score was 127 to 26 in favour of the visitors. Bill Smith was the pitcher and Charlie Maddock catcher for the Maple

Leafs. It was the week after the Guelph team had played the Philadelphia Yellow Stockings and got licked and in looking around for some outside club to even up on, the Nil Desperandum were chosen. The Maple Leafs played the big clubs in those days and they often won out too.

The scorers work was rather primitive. The official deputized for that work had no modern score book in which to record hits, bases, fouls, runs, strike outs, etc. It would have taken a sheet as big as a barn. The scorer came to the game with a nicely planed or whittled square piece of clear pine. When a run was made for one team it was notched neatly on one side, and when the other fellows scored, it was notched on the other. For a game like that with the Maple Leafs the scorer's tally stick had to be about four feet long."

Dominion Champs

Dominion of Canada Champions for four years and six time winners of the Canadian Manufacturers' trophy were Beardmore and Co. 1914-1917 war teams in the late 20's and early 30's. The Acton teams proved they had more pull than any comparable outfit from anywhere in this wide Dominion at the C.N.E. capturing dozens of other minor trophies as well. Trophies, shields and medals of solid gold and silver won by the teams would fill a good sized room.



AN EARLY BASEBALL TEAM poses sedately in front of a scenic backdrop. Pictured above are back row left to right, Dave Kenney, Bill Worden and John Agnew, middle row, Bob Lawson, Tom Kenney and Will Storey, front row, Andrew Mallart, Charles Matthews and Wes Mann.



SNAPPED AT DELHI immediately after winning the O.B.A. Int. "C" Championship of Ontario is the 1947 Acton Int. team. Considered the best all-round club ever to represent Acton in baseball the club ousted Georgetown, Walkerton, Clinton, Watford, Sunderland and Delhi in that order and became the first Acton baseball team to win an Ontario championship. Although not shown in the above photo, Eddie Ryder, father of Don, ace southpaw of the club, was a former Acton manager and player in former days.